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ABSTRACT

This document summarizes information on the second year of operation of 93 projects participating in the State of Illinois prekindergarten educational grant program for children at-risk due to environmental deficits. Contents provide: (1) background information on the legislation establishing the program, program evaluation schedules, and a two-year program summary; (2) introductory material describing data collection efforts made during the 1986-87 school year; (3) a discussion of program characteristics; and (4) follow-up information on prekindergarten participants who enrolled in kindergarten during 1986-87. (RH)

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Second Interim Report

Prekindergarten Programs for 3 and 4 year Old Children at Risk of Academic Failure

1986-87 School Year
(FY'87)

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Background

Legislation enacted in 1985 authorized the Illinois State Board of Education to implement and administer a new grant program for public school districts to conduct prekindergarten educational programs for children aged 3 to 5 years. The statute identified the population to be served as children who are at risk of academic failure because of their home and community environment. The first programs were approved to begin services in January of 1986, or the last 6 months of the 1985-86 school year, and provided services to almost 5,400 children in 100 approved district projects. The 1986-87 school year was the first full school year of program participation and 93 district projects were funded to serve 6,953 children. (See Table 1.)

Each cohort of prekindergarten participants will be part of a three-year longitudinal study and public school districts must report the progress of each child as they matriculate through kindergarten, first, and second grades. The State Board of Education must report on the prekindergarten projects to the General Assembly by July, 1989, and every three years thereafter, identifying which programs have been most successful in promoting academic excellence and alleviating academic failure. A comprehensive report covering the three years will be prepared in FY 89.

A summary for the first two years of funding for the projects follows. Although funding increased by $600,000 in FY 87, the second year of the projects encompassed a full school year (compared to a half year during FY 86) and approximately 1,500 more children received services. These factors caused financial constraints and several important program components were not funded for FY'87: transportation, administrative costs and remodeling costs, for example. Some projects supplemented their grants with local funds. These financial constraints also led to a state capacity to fund only projects started in FY'86. Thus, all 93 projects for FY'87 were in the second year of operation. Six projects were not funded the second year either by request or because of failing to meet the conditions and standards set by the State Board of Education guidelines.

Table 1: Prekindergarten Summary for FY'86 and FY'87

	# Proposals Received	# Projects Funded	Total Appropriation	# Children Served
FY 86 (Jan.-June, 1986)	162	100	$12.1 million ($3.1 million screening) (9.0 million program)	5,394
FY 87 (July 1986-June 1987)	136	96	$12.7 million (screening and program)	6,953

This document presents a condensed summary of the second year of operation for the prekindergarten projects and reports on preliminary findings for the children who participated during the 1986-87 school year. Preliminary information on the children who have progressed from the prekindergarten level to kindergarten is also provided.

Introduction

Three data collections were conducted during the 1986-87 school year. A Prekindergarten Program Record was completed by representatives from each of the 93 funded projects. This program record provides descriptive information concerning procedures, services, staff, facilities and other administrative data. Program staff also completed the Prekindergarten Student Record, which provides demographic information on each child, individual program and personal information relative to each child, and an assessment of each child's readiness for kindergarten at the termination of the prekindergarten experience. Finally, staff from the participating public school districts with a prekindergarten program were required to submit information for the First Follow-Up Prekindergarten Student Record. The follow-up record reports the child's placement in school following prekindergarten and reports the child's progress and achievement in the basic subject areas: Reading, Mathematics, and Language. "Behavior/School Adjustment" is also reported. In 1986-87, many of the first prekindergarten participants entered kindergarten and a few children entered first grade. (See Table 2.)

Prekindergarten Programs, 1986-87

More children were served during the 1986-87 school year. Ninety-three projects (encompassing 202 public school districts) served almost 6,953 preschool children, compared to 5,400 children served by 100 projects during the Jan.-June, 1986 period. Approximately 2,400 children in 1986-87 were found to be eligible but were not served. Half of the unserved children were placed on waiting lists for possible entry if and when openings occurred. Whether the other eligible children received services from other public or private sources is unknown.

Screening procedures identified children as eligible for services based on local criteria and state-required assessment. Approximately 26,750 children were screened to determine whether they were at risk of school failure. Selection criteria included discretionary standards based on individual district expectations for kindergarten entry skills and proficiencies, performance on standardized early childhood tests of development, and characteristics of the child's environment and family circumstances. In some instances, age was a factor, with older children being given priority because of the necessity of intervention prior to kindergarten entry. All children were required to be assessed in the areas of vocabulary, visual motor integration, language and speech development, fine and gross motor skills, and social skills. Through these screening procedures, approximately 9,400 children were found to be eligible for services, while 6,953 received services.

Characteristics of the participating children were in congruence with the statutory definition of children at risk of school failure. The majority of children were members of groups that the research literature has identified as having unacceptably large proportions of children who experience difficulty and failure in school. The majority of children had no prior preschool experience (63%). State-wide, large proportions of the children were from minority groups (45.6%), low-income families (46%), single parent families (37%), and limited-English-speaking families (14%). The Chicago School District project had substantially higher representation in all of the above groups than did down-state projects.

Approximately one child in four was found to have a vision or hearing deficit, immunization needs, or some other health problem that required attention but was not severe enough to warrant special education eligibility.

The majority of children were 4-years-old (62%), with 3-year-old children (26%) comprising most of the remainder. The remaining 12% of children were younger or older (children who turned 5-years-old in the fall preceding kindergarten).

Almost all projects offered traditional classroom preschool program designs. The vast majority of children (95%) received classroom instruction five days a week (61%), four days a week (31%) or three or fewer days per week (7%). The majority of program sessions were 2.5 to 3 hours a day. Fourteen projects offered full-day programs. Twelve percent of the projects offered services and instruction in the children's homes, sometimes in tandem with a classroom program.

Almost all projects (97%) offer separate educational programs for parents and for children.

Parent involvement and education activities were offered in all projects. To encourage parent participation, many projects offered child care during meetings (65%), evening meetings (77%), transportation (27%) and weekend meetings (11%). In addition to traditional involvement such as classroom assistance/observation, home activities and field trips, 3,473 parents received individual consultations, 1,731 parents attended small group meetings, and 2,026 parents attended large group meetings. Finally, 1,171 parents attended other types of parents education sessions. These numbers, of course, represent duplicated counts since a project may (and most did) offer more than one type of parent education activity. Only 8% of all children had parents who failed to participate in one or more activities.

Approximately one-fourth of the children were attending the program for a second year. In order to attend a prekindergarten program for two years, children must enter at 3-years-of-age. Children who are age-eligible for kindergarten are not admitted into prekindergarten programs.

More than half of the children were at average or above-average readiness levels for their local kindergartens following their participation in the prekindergarten program. Based on the testing used in individual projects, the majority of children (56%) who were age-eligible for kindergarten were reported to be at or above the readiness standards for that particular district's kindergarten program. Slightly less than a third (32%) of the children were reported to be "somewhat-below-average" and 11% of the children were "clearly-deficient" in readiness skills. These ratings must be interpreted with the realization that all prekindergarten participants displayed deficiencies in order to be eligible for prekindergarten services.

For the 1986-87 year, children were scheduled to attend an average of 136 days of instruction, with the average number of absences per child at 14 days.

More teachers qualified under the Child Care Act of 1969, as amended, than held an Early Childhood Teaching Certificate. The total of 289 teachers employed by projects held either an Early Childhood Teaching Certificate (42%) or were qualified under the Child Care Act of 1969 (58%). Eighty-one projects employed 209 teacher's aides, 37% of whom were certified by the State Board of Education and 62% of whom were uncertified.

Staff-child ratios were lower than the state-required maximum limit for almost all projects. The median staff-student ratio was 1:7, well below the 1:10 limit maximum prescribed by ISBE guidelines. Only one project exceeded the 1:10 ratio and 78 of the 93 projects had lower than 1:10 ratios in their largest classroom.

Follow-Up Information for Prekindergarten Participants who Enrolled in Kindergarten During 1986-87

Each of the 5,394 children enrolled in the first year (FY 86) of prekindergarten programs was assigned a unique identification number that was used to identify the child for follow-up information during the school years.

The administrative district for each funded project was sent a follow-up form with the children's identification numbers and was instructed to provide follow-up information about the children's educational progress and placement for the 1986-87 (FY'87) school year. This section of the report summarizes what happened to the first group of prekindergarten participants and how they have achieved during the year in school (kindergarten) following their prekindergarten experience.

Follow-up school placement and achievement data are limited to those children who were placed in a regular education kindergarten. To meet the statutory requirement of reporting success in school, an assumption was made that the children in question are those who progress through the normal sequence of educational grades. On this basis, 1961 (43%) children were reported as entering kindergarten for the 1986-87 school year. The placement of the remaining children is shown below in Table 1.

Table 2: 1986-87 Placement of Children Who Participated in the Jan.-June, 1986 Prekindergarten Program

1986-87 Placement	No. of Children	% of Children*
2nd Year Prekindergarten	1,598	35%
Kindergarten	1,729	38%
Kindergarten w/Supplemental Ser.	232	5%
Transition Classroom	8	Less than 1%
First Grade	29	1%
Special Education Class	130	3%
Bilingual Self-Contained Class	37	1%
Headstart Program	13	Less than 1%
Private School Kindergarten	106	2%
Unknown/Moved/Not Enrolled	668	15%
Under Kindergarten Age/Home	2	Less than 1%
Deceased	1	Less than 1%
Total	4,553**	100%

* Rounded to nearest full percent

** Reflects 841 fewer children than the total number served (5,394) for the following reasons: (1) Some children who withdrew from the prekindergarten program after a very short enrollment period (i.e., 6 weeks); (2) Some children enrolled in programs where children received no direct services (Peoria and Champaign projects, for example); and some instances where projects failed to provide any records of having served the child.

The large majority of prekindergarten children achieved at or above average levels during kindergarten. The following table indicates that children who had attended prekindergarten programs experienced success in their local district kindergarten programs. From two-thirds to three-quarters of the children achieved at the average or above-average standards for all kindergarten children in the district. Even more striking is the very low percentage of children who were rated at inadequate/failure levels by their local school districts.

Table 3: Percent of Kindergarten Children Rated at Average or Above-Average in Four Areas of Achievement

Achievement Level	Reading	Mathematics	Language	Behavior
Above Average	20%	19%	15%	27%
Average	46%	52%	54%	53%
Below Average	25%	22%	24%	16%
Inadequate	7%	6%	5%	3%
Unknown/NA	1%	2%	2%	2%

Note: % rounded to nearest full percentage point.

Eighty-four percent of children (approximately 1,650) who participated in prekindergarten programs successfully completed kindergarten and were recommended for advancement to the first grade. Of these, 70% received unqualified advancement, 11% were recommended for advancement with supplemental services, and 3% were to advance with the provision of some special education services.

An additional 5% of the kindergarten children with prior prekindergarten participation were placed in transition classes, which constitute partial advancement (above kindergarten but below first grade). Finally, 10% of the children failed to successfully cope with the school's expectations. Of these, 6% were retained at the kindergarten level and 4% were recommended for placement in self-contained special education classes.

Minority "at-risk" children were more successful in kindergarten than were white "at-risk" children when both groups attended prekindergarten programs. All racial categories of children had majorities of successful students in kindergarten, but in differing proportions. Table 4 shows the proportion of children from each racial/ethnic group performing at average or above average achievement levels.

The data show that, in all achievement areas except reading, proportionately fewer white children performed at the level of average/above-average than did other racial/ethnic groups.

Table 4: Percent of Kindergarten Children from Racial/Ethnic Groups Rated at Average or Above-Average in Four Areas of Achievement

Racial/Ethnic Group	Reading	Mathematics	Language	Behavior
White, Not Hispanic	60%	67%	65%	78%
Black, Not Hispanic	70%	73%	76%	81%
Hispanic	60%	77%	74%	84%
American Indian/ Alaskan Native*	75%	100%	100%	100%
Asian	78%	83%	65%	83%

*Very Small group size Total=8 children.

Males and females were equally likely to experience success in kindergarten.

Children attended an average of 164 days of instruction during kindergarten, with an average of 11 days absence for each child (lower than the 14 days average absence reported for prekindergarten children).

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